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U of M plan could mean big changes in Rosemount, Empire

Nathan Hansen Rosemount Town Pages
Published Wednesday, November 15, 2006

Is it a housing development? A research facility? A little of both? For now, maybe it's best to just call it UMore Town.

Last week the University of Minnesota's Board of Regents heard a proposal that would turn 5,000 acres of University-owned land in Rosemount and Empire Township into a housing project that could, when finished, more than double Rosemount's current population.

The plan presented last week is the result of a strategic planning process that began in February. Charles Muscoplat, the University's vice president of statewide strategic resource development, said at the time the school had an opportunity to do

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something great with the land. According to the current plan that “something great” involves the creation of a city-sized development that will use the University’s planning and research resources to create something that sounds like part suburb, part science experiment, part commune.



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windmills.

- Houses designed to be energy-efficient and environmentally-friendly.

The idea, according to the vision presented last week, is to create a sustainable community with features to improve education, health and energy use for residents.

According to Muscoplat, the University could use the development to conduct academic projects related to housing design, energy use, clean water, agriculture health care and early childhood education, among other things.

“They’re all the same themes that occur over and over again,” he said.

Exactly how all this will come together is far from clear. Muscoplat expects the University will be able to pay for the planning process through the sale of as much as 500,000 tons of concrete left over on the site from the former Gopher Ordinance Works munitions plant, and from the mining of gravel on the property. Estimates put the value of gravel deposits on the site at \$14 to \$21 million.

According to early plans the project could include:

- A network of trails for walking and biking.
- A weekly farmer’s market.
- A University-built learning center featuring a library and regular lectures by University professors.
- A health and wellness complex that “serves residents and others through the range of education and wellness, physical activities, health care....”
- Power provided solely or in large part by University-built windmills.

Muscoplat hopes to start working early next year with the United States Army, which built the munitions plant during World War II, to determine whether the site is polluted and what it might take to clean it up.

“We are working extremely hard with the Army to try to get a more complete assessment of any environmental impact,” Muscoplat said.

The University will also have to develop a comprehensive plan for the site. That would be due by 2008 if the Regents choose to proceed.

Once a comprehensive plan is in place the University will sell small parcels of land to developers who would agree to work according to that plan.

There are plenty of other questions to answer. How would this development, expected to bring in 20,000 to 30,000 new residents, affect Rosemount and the rest of Dakota County? What would the final development look like? How, exactly, would the University be involved?

Still, for all its questions Muscoplat believes this is the best option for the UMore land, which the University bought from the federal government for \$1 after the Gopher Ordinance plant closed. The other options presented to regents last week included doing nothing for at least 10 years or selling the land to developers now and essentially washing the University’s hands of it.

“It’s not easy to sell (the land),” Muscoplat said. “There’s all that old Gopher Ordinance Works. That kind of presents a complication to selling the land. Then, it could contribute to sprawl. I don’t think we’d build anything (that way) that would further the University’s mission.

“This is a rapidly growing part of the metropolitan area,” Muscoplat said. “Selling the property might have a short-term financial gain, but it misses the huge opportunity we have with UMore Park. And waiting to develop the property until everything around it is developed minimizes our options and diminishes the opportunity.”

Similar planned developments are in the works around North America. One, called Stapleton, is taking place on the site of Denver’s former airport and Simon Fraser University and the University of British Columbia have both developed university-linked communities.

Muscoplat planned to present the University's current proposal to Dakota County officials on Tuesday morning and to Rosemount city officials on Wednesday.

For a full copy of the vision for UMore Park visit www.umorepark.umn.edu.

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